

Mr. J. S. Johnson
Attn: SURTASS LFA Sonar EIS Program Manager
4100 Fairfax Drive, Suite 730
Arlington, VA 22203

Dear Mr. Johnson:

In accordance with our responsibilities under Section 309 of the Clean Air Act and the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has reviewed the Draft Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement (DSEIS) for Surveillance Towed Array Sensor System Low Frequency Active (SURTASS LFA) Sonar (CEQ# 20050460).

The original Final Overseas Environmental Impact Statement/Environmental Impact Statement (FOEIS/EIS) (prepared pursuant to Executive Order 12114 and NEPA) for SURTASS LFA sonar was completed in January 2001 by the Navy with the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) as a cooperating agency. NMFS is also a cooperating agency in the development of this SEIS. As in 2001, the Navy's primary mission is to maintain, train, equip, and operate combat-ready naval forces capable of winning wars, deterring aggression and maintaining freedom of the seas. The purpose of the proposed action remains the same as that in the original FOEIS/EIS. It is to meet U.S. need for improved capability to detect quieter and harder-to-find foreign submarines at long range. This capability would provide U.S. forces with adequate time to react to and defend against potential submarine threats while remaining at a safe distance beyond a submarine's effective weapons range. To meet its long-range detection need, the Navy has determined low frequency active sonar as the only system capable of providing long-range detection during most weather conditions, day or night. It has also determined that low frequency active sonar is the only available technology capable of meeting the U.S. need to improve detection of quieter and harder-to-find foreign submarines at long range.

The primary focus of this DSEIS is on providing additional information regarding the environment that could potentially be affected by employment of SURTASS LFA and providing additional information related to mitigation of the potential impacts of the system. It also addresses pertinent deficiencies raised by the U.S. District Court for the District of Northern California including additional mitigation and monitoring, additional area alternatives analysis, and analysis of the potential impacts on low frequency sound on fish. Finally, it also provides the information necessary to apply for a new five-year rule that would provide for the incidental takes under the Marine Mammal Protection Act (MMPA), taking into account the National Defense Authorization Act FY04 amendments to the MMPA for military readiness.

The Navy's proposed action is to employ up to four SURTASS LFA sonar systems in the

oceanic areas. Based on current operational requirements, exercises using these sonar systems would occur in the Pacific, Atlantic, and Indian Oceans, and the Mediterranean Sea. To reduce adverse effects on the marine environment, areas would be excluded as necessary to prevent 180-decibel (dB) sound pressure levels or greater within specific geographic range of land, in offshore biologically important areas during biologically important seasons, and in areas necessary to prevent greater than 145-dB at known recreational and commercial dive sites.

EPA commends the efforts of the Navy in the preparation of this comprehensive and well-organized document. Based on our review of the DSEIS and the incorporation of the mitigation measures discussed above, we believe that the proposed action will not cause any significant adverse impacts. Accordingly, we have rated the document as LO-Lack of Objections.

We appreciate the opportunity to review this DSEIS. We also look forward to reviewing the FSEIS related to this project. The staff contact for the review is Marthea Rountree and she can be reached at (202) 564-7141.

Sincerely,

/s/

Anne Norton Miller
Director
Office of Federal Activities